1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13



Going on to the marital status of the villagers, I found that the forty-eight households were to be classified as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Monogynous | 27 | (including 7 at the school) |
| Widowers (all formerly monogynous) | 3 | ( „ 1 „ ) |
| Widows | 7 | ( „ 4 „ ) |
| Young (unmarried) man | 1 | (at the school) |
| Polygynous | 10 | |
| Total | 48 | |

Whether a similar proportion of monogynous to polygynous households would also be found more widely among the Ovimbundu is a question which could only be settled by extensive demographic studies.[1] My impression is that the proportion of polygynous to monogynous households is higher in the region of Kasonge than in other Umbundu areas for the following reasons:

1. The proximity of Kasonge to the Esele country which has long been a source of supply for concubines (slaves). (Five of the ten polygynous householders in Ngendo included at least one Esele concubine.)
2. The comparatively low bride-price in Kasonge as compared to other areas.

The South African Census for 1921 showed that at that time only one man in eight was polygynous.[2] My impression is that the proportion among the Ovimbundu is no greater and that economic factors will soon do away with any considerable polygyny.

In each of the ten polygynous households in Ngendo save one, there were only two wives or concubines. The one exception was

[1] The census of 1940 gives more reliable figures and more details than were previously available, but it does not provide a basis for studies of this order. The number or proportion of polygamous unions among the 'uncivilized population' was not recorded. For the whole colony, the division of the native population by sex is given as follows: males, 1,733,328, females, 1,932,501 (op. cit., vol. i, p. 78 f.); and for the Ovimbundu (*Mbundo*), as follows: males, 636,583, females, 694,504 (op. cit., vol. ix, p. 22 f.). Owing to the migration of labourers, and especially to the system known as 'contract labour', certain areas (of recruitment) show a large excess of females over males (as much as 4 to 1 in the 20–29 age-groups of certain areas), while certain (receiving) areas show a corresponding excess of males over females (4 to 1 in several areas and even 22 to 1 in one area, for the same age-groups) (op. cit., vol. iii, *passim*). On this subject, *vide* R. R. Kuczynski, *Colonial Population* (London, 1937), and *Population Movements* (ibid., 1936); both summarized in the *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, no. 2.

[2] Quoted by P. A. W. Cook, *The Education of a South African Tribe* (Cape Town; Juta, 1924), p. 2.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13



the household of the headman Sikilile, who had had four wives and one young Esele concubine. At the time of my last visit (1936), however, there were only two wives and the concubine, one wife having died, and another having gone to her people.

To complete the picture of the villagers, their numbers were as follows:

| Village | Men | Women | Children | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Male | Female | |
| In Sikilile's village . . | 24 | 35 | 31 | 37 | 127 |
| In Ciyanda . . . | 5 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 19 |
| In Kanjengo . . . | 3 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 13 |
| At the School . . . | 10 | 11 | 10 | 6 | 37 |
| Total . . . | 42 | 60 | 46 | 48 | |
| | Adults: 102 | | Children: 94[1] | | 196 |

In Sikilile's village there were domestic animals as follows: 9 head of cattle, 13 goats, 20 sheep, 100 pigs, and about 100 chickens. There was practically no professional specialization; there were almost no specialists living in the village: no blacksmith or carpenter, no mat-maker, but only one 'hunter of meat', and three 'hunters of (bee-) hives'. As to the women, all could make baskets, and there were several who had made pottery, but were not doing so at the time.

Pigs, chickens, and dogs roamed the village, functioning as a D.S.C. and a sewer system combined. Were it not for these scavengers the villages of the Ovimbundu would present an even more untidy spectacle than is the case. There is no other regular disposal of refuse, nor are there any latrines or privies.[2]

It will be seen that there is practically no division of labour as between households: each is practically a self-contained unit. The

[1] It was reported that in addition to the children then living, these same households had lost 57 by death (29 males and 28 females).

[2] At Ngendo the school village had two or three enclosed pit privies. The Umbundu euphemism for defecate, 'go to the bush' (*oku enda kusenge*), is revealing. Even more revealing is a proverb which advises one not to burn his bridges behind him, but literally it runs as follows:

*Nda ua lisinga huti, Si endi kosyima onjo,*
*Nda o ka tiatia yi?*

If you forswear yourself saying, I shall not go behind the house,
Then will you go (to) urinate where?

There is a more shocking version which, however, may not be really authentic.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

# CHAPTER III

# KINSHIP

## *The Household*

592 THE basis of the village and of the whole Umbundu kinship structure is the household consisting of a man, his wife or wives and their children, together with such other related or unrelated dependants as may be attached and live together in a single compound. The Umbundu word for the household is *ocikumba*, which includes domestic animals and possessions as well as the persons who make up the group, but nowadays this word is rarely, if ever, heard. The word *onjo*, which means 'house', is also used in the sense of household and to include the one or more 'houses' which a man has established by marriage. The housing arrangements of the household and its relation to the other households and to the headman of the village have been noted. The chief facts to remember are that each wife has her own hut, granary, chickens, and fields for her children and herself; and that the husband has no house of his own save a spirit hut (*etambo*), in case he is village headman or a family elder. There is not the same [595] relation between the rank of the wives and the position of their houses with relation to the cattle kraal, which is found among the cattle-raising Southern Bantu, nor are there the same distinctions of precedence. The eldest child (*nuñulū*) of his father, of whatever wife or concubine, takes precedence over all who are born later. It is nevertheless true among commoners that the first wife legally married is the chief wife. The number of persons belonging to a single household may vary greatly. Magyar stated that his father-in-law Kayaya Kayangula (king of Viye *c.* 1847–50) had seventeen sons and forty-four daughters.[1] Some recent kings have had as many as twelve wives and concubines, but I do not know of any having had even half as many children as Kayangula had. The only large household in the village of Ngendo was that of the headman, Sikūlē, with five wives and concubines, and fifteen children (most of whom were already grown at the time of my visits). The largest of the other households in that village had

[1] Magyar, op. cit., p. 260.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13



only five children living, and the largest polygynous household had only four, but many children had died in infancy.

The attitudes within the household are much like those found universally between members of the same 'family'. Children respect and love both parents. Perhaps there is a little more respect for the father and a little more love for the mother, but this distinction is not carried to the extent which seems to be the case in more strongly patrilineal societies. The respect which a child has for his parents is plainly shown in his refusal under ordinary circumstances to speak their names. 'Even a child on being asked to tell the name of his father or his mother, will reply saying, "*Tate* (my father) indeed is his name." And if one asks again, saying, "Your mother, what is her name?" the child will reply saying, "*Mai* (my mother) indeed is her name."'[1] The sex division of Umbundu life begins within the household when very early in life the boys begin to be trained by their elder brothers, fathers, and other male relatives, while the girls remain or go about with their mothers, elder sisters, and other female relatives. Only the very small boys and girls (say under six or eight) play together. The age distinctions of Umbundu society are learned with the child's first attempts at language. Either his elder brother or sister he calls *kuvange*, and he soon learns that the brother or sister younger than himself is *manjange*. Brothers and sisters, siblings or children of the same parents, 'are replicas of one another in social relationship, and . . . socially identical'[2] for practical purposes. Among Ovimbundu the principal differences are due to the two factors of age and sex. The influence of age is fundamental and is easily demonstrated by the fact that there is no word for 'brother' but instead for 'elder brother' or 'younger brother'. Within the household the factor of sex is ever present, but there is not the invidious distinction found among some of the more strongly patrilineal societies such as the Zulu[2] which reserves the more respectful term for the brother. Umbundu applies the terms *kuva* and *manja*[3] to brothers and sisters without distinction of sex. There are the additional terms *kota* (elder brother), *mbuale* (sister), and the reciprocal terms *mume* (brother, spoken

[1] R. Kavita Evambé, from an Umbundu manuscript.

[2] E. J. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus* (London: Longmans, 1936), p. 24.

[3] These are the root terms without the possessive suffixes.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13



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### E. *Second Ascendant Generation: Either Man or Woman the Speaker*

| *Term* | *Relation* | *Reciprocal term* |
|---|---|---|
| 1. *Maikulu*[1] (*Nyokulu*) | grandmother, both maternal and paternal<br>grandmother's sister<br>grandfather's sister | *onekulu yange* |
| 2. *Sekulu*[1] (*Tatekulu*) | grandfather, both maternal and paternal<br>grandfather's brother<br>grandmother's brother | *onekulu yange* |

### F. *Third Ascendant Generation*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Kuku* | all relatives of this generation | *onekuluila* or *omokolole yange* |

### G. *Fourth Ascendant Generation*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Kukulu's* | all relatives of this generation | *onene yange* |

### H. *Fifth Ascendant Generation*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Kukululus* | all relatives of this generation | *onei yange* |

### I. *Sixth Ascendant Generation*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Ku* | all relatives of this generation | *oneka yange* |

### J. *First Descendant Generation*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. *Omõlinge* | my own child<br>woman's sister's child<br>man's brother's child<br>mother's sister's grandchild<br>father's brother's grandchild | *tate* or *mãi* |
| *mõlõlõ* or *weli* | first-born child | |
| 2. *Ocimumbu* | woman's brother's child<br>man's sister's child<br>mother's brother's grandchild<br>father's sister's grandchild | *tatekõi* or *mamu* |

The kinship terms for further descendant generations will be found in the column of 'reciprocal terms' given above. It does not seem necessary to repeat them.

602 592 The patterns of behaviour between these many blood relatives find their prototypes in the patterns of the household. Love for

[1] *Maikulu* and *Sekulu* are sometimes used interchangeably for persons of either sex. Each has only the two personal forms. The forms in parenthesis are but little used. *Inakulu* is used for the queen.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13



602 592 the mother who bore me and the consideration naturally expected from her cannot, in the nature of things, be given or received by *all* of the elder and younger mothers in exactly equal degree, but the type of behaviour is similar. The elder sister who carried her younger brother about on her back when she herself could hardly more than walk, or the elder brother who first taught his younger brother to make and set his little traps, has a warmth of regard which he cannot extend with just the same force to fifty or one hundred younger brothers, but nevertheless the pattern will be of the same sort if and when similar opportunity offers. The same may be said for the younger and the elder fathers, and again for the *tatekãi*, the 'female father'. But here elements other than 605 604 the early household patterns enter as also with *manu*, the mother's brother. Chief of these other elements is the fact that these two classes of relatives, together with the *va cepua*, i.e. cross-cousins (mostly children of the *manu* and *tatekãi* classes), and also the *ovimumba* (plural) (one's own nephews along similar lines of descent), are all potential spouses or potential relatives-in-law.[1] The relations of *ocimumba* (sister's son) and *manu* (mother's brother) in Umbundu society follow a pattern not exactly like any other set of relationships in any society of which I know. Suggestions of this have already been given. The *manu* shares his sister's desire for the advancement of her son, and if the nephew has had a part of his education in the uncle's home or on his trading expeditions, the relationship will have become closer. It may be, however, that the uncle's own difficulties may lead him to exploit his nephew rather than to attend only to his advancement.[2] The 602 178 ties of the paternal group tend to be strengthened at the expense of the maternal family and it seems that the increasing localization of the Umbundu family with the supplanting of trade by agriculture (as a man's full-time occupation) has furthered this process.

602 It is very important for one who would understand the Ovimbundu to look upon the Umbundu kinship structure with the eyes of an Ocimbundu. If one brought up to other ideas and other relationships finds this difficult, that is all the more reason for making the effort. I cannot better summarize the Umbundu

[1] See *infra*, pp. 52 ff.

[2] This is one of several points where the commercial tendencies seem to come into conflict with the patterns of the kinship group.

1: Childs M-5 (1824-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13



182 621 in a somewhat decadent state, the Umbundu village has up to the present maintained its status as a local kinship unit.

182 592 602 The household is not a solitary unit but a part of the village. Since it is constituted by marriage, it embodies the union of at least two kinship groups. The attitudes and behaviour patterns within the Umbundu household are basically those universally recognized. In common with the households of most Bantu cultures, it differs from the European model in that it extends its attitudes and behaviour patterns to the wider kinship groupings by means of a classificatory system of relationship.

613 182 In the wider kinship groupings (*epata*), the Ovimbundu recognize both the maternal (*oluina*) and the paternal (*oluse*) lines of descent. The functions of the latter have been largely local, residential, social, and religious, with succession (of status) in the male line. The function of the former has been cohesive over a larger territory, with a recognized head in whom has been vested both religious and economic functions. Both his office and the inheritance of property descend in the female line. Much of the power, economic and personal, formerly held by the *oluina*, in the person of the mother's brother, seems to be passing at the present time to the *oluse*, in the person of the father. The bilineal kinship system has been a strongly cohesive social force.

182 [582] The form of marriage practised by the Ovimbundu is of the two-way cross-cousin type in both lines of kin and in three generations. It seems to be an individual type developed in the particular social and economic situation of the Ovimbundu. As a contract between two families and as a new venture, the marriage relation demands that great attention be given to attitudes and behaviour patterns which emphasize mutual respect.

[561] The hierarchy of age is a very real factor in the Umbundu social structure. Age-set 'schools' have not existed generally throughout the tribes, but there are associations of coevals. This is largely a cohesive force.

754 Sorcery is the most important disruptive force at work *within* Umbundu society. Working as it does, within kinship groups, and inasmuch as it seems to be on the increase, sorcery embodies a real danger to social cohesion.

184 178 Homogeneity has never been an attribute of the Ovimbundu as regards their racial or cultural make-up. The slave-trade injected other and more diverse elements, and recent movements and

611 dispersed. Both groups have ritual leaders, whose offices are quite dis-
613 tinct. Barnes' suggestion[1] is that the two groups must be father's patrilineage and mother's matrilineage, with the qualification mentioned below.

613 The *oluse* consists of a large number of village groups, some of which
622 recognise mutual relationship,[2] but with no recognised head (other than
[428] the village headmen) except in the case of the royal families. Land is owned by the *oluse* and passed on within it from father to son, or from elder to younger brother. Succession to village or tribal office, from village headman to king, descends in the same way.[3] Ritual leadership
[346] within the *oluse* lies with the village headman, who is in charge of the spirit-hut *(etambo)* of the guardian spirit of the village (or of the nuclear *oluse* within the village), and who officiates at regular village worship, including agricultural festivals.

613 The *oluina*, on the other hand, is a dispersed and apparently larger
428 group, whose members live with their various paternal lines of descent.
604 The size of the *oluina* is unknown; Childs merely refers to it as a "large and widespread organization, with a recognized head". The office of head of the *oluina (ukulu wepata)* descends from mother's brother to sister's son. Negotiable and moveable property, including cattle and trade goods, is owned by the *oluina* and inherited by the sister's son. Formerly the mother's elder brother had great powers over his sister's sons, and was even able to pawn them or sell them into slavery, to meet his own debts.
[592] The patrilocal household is usually responsible for training children, especially during their early years, but they are frequently sent to the *oluina* (i.e. to the mother's brother) for at least a part of their education.
[586] At death or divorce of parents, children go to the *oluina*.

43 The head *(ukulu wepata)* of the *oluina* is usually both the legal and
782 spiritual head of the group, although today the two functions are often divided. He is in charge of the spirit hut *(etambo)* of the guardian spirit of the *oluina* (of whom there may be more than one, and of whom he becomes one after death). He leads the *oluina* in propitiatory rituals carried out in case of illness, death, or other misfortunes within the group, or in prayers made for desired economic advantages. (Apparently no regular rituals are carried out by the *oluina*.) The *ukulu wepata* may or may not be at the same time a village headman; if he is, he will be priest of two lines and have charge of two spirit huts; if he is not, there may be two (or more) priests in the village, each in charge of the spirit-hut of his *oluse* or *oluina*.

*The onělě yohonji and the onělě yohumba*

613 The *oluse* and the *oluina* are both divided into male and female
602 "sides": the *onělě yohonji* (the side of the bow) and the *onělě yohumba*
582 (the side of the basket). It has been noted above that uterine brothers and sisters belong to the same *oluse* and *oluina*, but to the male or female side in each, according to sex. The composition of these "sides" is

(1) Loc.cit.
(2) If some villages within the *oluse* cannot trace mutual relationship, the *oluse* should perhaps be called a petri-clan rather than a patrilineage.
(3) But see below, p.29.

606 ociumbo (since Childs states (p.55) that it includes every relative of the generation of the spouse's parents.) *Ndatembo* must avoid: (i) speaking each other's names. This may be accomplished by using the names compounded from those of children (thus *Nakombotio* and *Sakombotio* are the father and mother of Kombotio) or by using the term which one's spouse uses, i.e. *mai, tate,* nana etc. (ii) seeing each other, if they are of opposite sex; if it is necessary to converse, it must be done out of sight, or with gaze averted. (iii) eating with each other. (This applies only to regular meals and not to casual refreshment.)

607 (c) The term *nawe* is used reciprocally for all the spouse's relatives of one's own generation, including those classed as "sister", "brother" and "cross-cousin". Between the *nawe* the only avoidance enjoined is that they may not eat regular meals in each other's presence; otherwise they are on "free and easy" terms".

"Avoidance of meeting ... is especially difficult for the bride who comes to live in a village of her husband's people, a large proportion of the men of which may be *ndatembo* to her. The prohibition may be lifted by .. a simple ceremony, in which each rubs a little oil on the other ... Avoidance of eating in each other's presence may be done away with after some months by sacrificing a chicken and feeding it ceremonially .. to the *ndatembo* or *nawe* ... It is especially important that the ceremonies be carried through with respect *(esumbilo)*."(1)

*A note on the kinship system*

613 421 178 There is a tendency today for the claims of the *oluse*, the land-owning group, to supplant those of the property-owning *oluina*; one important reason for this is the change from trade to agriculture as the most important economic activity. With European influence also conflicts have arisen over rights to children. Childs states(2) that the bilineal kinship system has been a factor leading to social stability, especially stability of marriage, but he does not elaborate this statement.

LOCAL GROUPS(3)

592 595 *The "household"*, consisting of a man, his wife or wives and children, and such other related or unrelated dependants as may be attached to this basic group, is the basis of the village. The word *onjo* (house) may be used for this group, i.e. to include the various houses which a man may have established by marriage, or it may be used for the house of any one of his wives. Each wife has her own hut, granary, chickens, and fields for her children and herself, and the husband has no house of his own unless he is village headman or the head of an *oluina*, in which case he has a spirit-hut *(etembo)* in which he may sometimes pass the night. Sons when they marry form their own households, usually in their father's village. The size of the household varies greatly according to wealth and status. Some recent kings have had as many as 12 wives. But it has been noted above that, in Childs' typical village, out of 48 households only 10

[591] [554]

(1) Childs, p.52.
(2) Ibid., p.56; see also ibid. pp.70, 45, 50 etc.
(3) This section is based on Childs, 1949, pp.25-41.

were polygynous and only one of these contain more than two wives.(1)

The village or tabo (plural ovitabo) may consist of from 5 to 500 such households, the heads of which are usually related agnatically to each other. Most, but not all, of the larger villages are olombala (villages of chiefs or sub-chiefs). These are said to have had formerly as many as 5,000 inhabitants,(2) but today few have as many as 3,000, and there is a general tendency towards smaller villages and even isolated households.(3) There are in general two quite different types of Umbundu village according to the terrain on which they are built. Those on the plains, where there is room to spread out, tend towards a circular shape, with the ocila and onjango (see below) near the centre. The various sections of the village may appear as quarters of a single whole, or they may be spread out haphazardly. Mountain villages(4) may have houses built on ledges almost one on top of the other. Here there is often no room or no suitable soil within the palisades for gardens or for the dancing-floor (ocila), which are found outside the palisade. Different sections of the village tend to string themselves out horizontally along the mountain-side, or to find successive ledges.

The typical village of Ngendo described by Childs, in Kasongi chiefdom, ombo (sub-chiefdom) of Ekongo, is of an intermediate type, built on a slope. Ngendo has 196 inhabitants, of whom 42 are men, 60 are women, and 94 children. The village is divided into four smaller sections or wards (ovitawila pl.), of which the largest, that of the village headman (sekulu) has 127 inhabitants, while the other three have 19, 13 and 37 inhabitants respectively. The word tabo (village) may also be used for either of the two larger sections by themselves. Each section has its own elder, but the dancing-floor (ocila), which is the centre of village life, is in the headman's section. The ocila is primarily a place for recreation, but religious functions also are held in it, and formal cases tried. Formerly most villages had a second communal building, the onjango or "Men's Club House",(5) whose importance was almost as great as that of the ocila. Here all the men, youths and boys gathered for the evening meal, and here guests were entertained, lesser judicial cases settled, and the day's work and gossip discussed, while young boys, sitting in the background, gained much of their knowledge of tribal history and custom.(6) Today the onjango exists and maintains its former function chiefly in parts of Ngalangi, Viye and possibly Ndulu. It does not exist in Childs' typical village, where the "Men's Club" holds only occasional meetings on the rocks behind the headman's house, and where the common evening meal no longer takes place. The reason suggested for the disappearance of the onjango is lack of leisure owing to demands for road work (in the immediate vicinity of Ngendo), for contract labour, involving absences of from six months to a year,(7) and the difficulty of securing tax-money.

(1) And polygyny is thought to be more frequent here than in other areas. See above, p.23.
(2) According to Magyar, 1851.
(3) Childs, op.cit., p.25, fn.1. Childs does not suggest any reasons for this tendency.
(4) Formerly many villages were built on mountains for defence, and capital villages of this type may still be seen.
(5) The "Men's Club" seems to be simply a gathering of all the adult men (and possibly also the juveniles) of the village.
(6) Childs, op.cit.; Cashmore, 1944; Hambly, (2) 1934.
(7) Most of the labour on the Benguella Railway is Umbundu, and many Ovimbundu travel to the Union of South Africa for work. (Childs, op.cit., p.10, et.al.)

621 The total number of households is 44, or 48 including those of the four section heads. It should be noted that there is a discrepancy in Child's
592 figures (apart from an obvious misprint):(1) in another context he writes
114 that section B contains only 12 houses (not even *households*), while from this table it would appear that section B has 15 household heads, including that of the section head; and section C is said to have 6 households, while only 4 (again counting the section head) are accounted for in this table.

591 Childs states(2) that the incidence of patrilocal marriage in Ngendo
114 is fairly typical of Umbundu country, but unfortunately gives little information regarding the relationship of the various spouses to each other or concerning the location of the villages from which they came. Matrilocal marriage is recognised as a possibility: of the three relatives by marriage listed above, one was a husband of a daughter of the headman, another the widow of a younger brother of the headman, who should have been inherited by a younger brother (?) or a mother's brother of the deceased, or, failing that, could have returned to her father's village. Of those listed above as sisters' children, two were widows who had come to live in the village with their mother's brothers.(3)

## POLITICAL STRUCTURE

### *The village headman*(4)

622 The village headman *(sekulu yimbo)* is also the head of the *oluse*
793 which forms the nucleus of the village group, and is related agnatically
782 to most of the householders. He alone may speak of the village as *imbo liange* (my village); the heads of sections, who are also called *sekulu*(5) may speak possessively only of their own sections *(ocitimila conge)*, and other villagers speak only of "our village" *(imbo lietu)*.(6) The headman functions as both priest and legal head of the village. As priest he has in his compound the *etambo* (spirit hut), in which the insignia of office are kept, and in which he prays to the ancestral spirits. Upon occasion he may sleep there, usually offering a prayer to the spirits when he wakes during the night. The *etambo* may also be
[34L] used as a lodging place for respected guests, or as a store-house for possessions not used every day. Childs states that he officiates at regular village worship, including agricultural festivals; Hambly adds that he may lead the people in offering sacrifices when epidemics of
613 sickness break out in the village. It has been noted above(7) that it is the function of the *oluina* head to lead such rituals when illness occurs within the *oluina*. In general the village head is responsible for
[622] matters - particularly agriculture and public health - which affect the whole village; individuals, both for protection and for help and other

(1) Childs, op.cit., p.28, line 27, where "twenty-four" should read "forty-four".
(2) On the basis of the 192 genealogies and 74 marriage-schedules which he collected. He does not, unfortunately, give examples or show how the comparison was made.
(3) Based on Childs, op.cit., pp.25-31.
(4) This section is based on Childs, op.cit., pp.36-7.
(5) It has been noted above that *sekulu* is used for all men (and some women) of the grandfather's generation.
(6) op.cit., p.283. (7) p.18.

B: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13



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*Kakululu* or *sekululu*. These terms are applicable to my father's father's brother, my father's father's brother's wife; my father's father's sister's husband; and my mother's father (the reciprocal *onekulu* describes the reciprocals, brother's son's son; husband's brother's son's son; wife's brother's son's son; daughter's son).

*Maikulu*. This designation, which is derived from *mai*, meaning mother, and *kulu*, an old person, is applied to my father's mother (reciprocal, *onekulu yange*, son's son). *Maikulu* also means my father's father's sister; my mother's mother; my mother's mother's brother's wife; and my mother's mother's sister (the reciprocal is *onekulu* which equals the English reciprocals brother's son's son; daughter's son; husband's daughter's child; and sister's daughter's child).

This completes the second generation of ascendants.

NOTE: Ngonga's wife uses the names *maikulu* and *kakululu* for those relatives of her husband to whom Ngonga himself applies those terms. These relatives call Ngonga's wife *onekulu*.

TABLE D

(*See Table E IV and V, also Table F II, IV and V*)

SOME OF NGONGA'S DESCENDANTS

*Nunulu* or *useli* is my first-born son. Other sons are *omola*, meaning child. *Omola ulume* means a male child. *Omola ukai* is a female child. *Useli* also means a first daughter (the reciprocal for these terms is *tate*, meaning father).

*Omolange* means my child. I apply the word, not only to my own children, but to my elder brother's son (reciprocal, *tate*, father's younger brother); to my elder brother's daughter; and to my younger brother's son.

*Ndatembo*. The word is applied to my son's wife; my daughter's husband; my elder brother's son's wife; my elder brother's daughter's husband; and my younger brother's son's wife (the same word *ndatembo* is used for the reciprocals of these terms; namely, husband's father; wife's father; husband's father's younger brother; wife's father's younger brother; and husband's father's elder brother).

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The foregoing classificatory system of relationship is not peculiar to the Ovimbundu, but is a cultural trait of many Bantu-speaking and some Sudanic-speaking Negroes. The similarity of the Umbundu system to those of surrounding peoples in Rhodesia and the Congo will be pointed out in chapters dealing with culture contacts.

591 592 [595] [597] [567] 596

When describing marriage rites reference was made to the fact that a wife goes to live near her husband's relatives; the system is therefore patrilocal. The limited family consists of husband and wife (or wives) with their children. The greatest number of wives observed in the family of a commoner was four, and in the family of a king eleven. A household sometimes contains adopted children, also domestic slaves (pawns) who are working to pay off debts for their maternal uncles. An extended family may include a grandfather and his wife, his sons, their wives and children, and his unmarried daughters, with classes and nomenclatures mentioned in the foregoing tables.

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The phrase *epata lia tate* (or *aluse*) means "family of my father" and includes all relatives on the father's side. The words *epata lia*

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## CHIEFS AND HEADMEN IN GUMBA

The tasks of recruiting contract labourers and road-workers and of getting fines and taxes paid, and such other duties as the arranging of compulsory purchase of tickets for the travelling cinema (showing patriotic films) are carried out through a long process of argument, attempted evasion, and pressure, between the chief, the government headmen, and the locally influential people, traditional headmen, catechists, and anyone else who can get himself listened to. Persons actually picked for contract labour or road work may make quite a fuss about it, but as such numbers are recruited it is ultimately accepted resignedly. It is not really practicable for a chief to discriminate in favour of his kinsman owing to the heavy demands for labour and the likelihood of such discrimination being reported at the post, as happened to Simbwyikoka. Demands for labour may fall heavily on some households. Thus one Epalanga household consisted of a man, his daughter by an earlier marriage, his wife and her baby daughter. The man had been taken for contract labour, his wife had been called to road work, and the adolescent daughter was carrying sisal[14] to the post. A kinsman of the household head attempted to arrange for some watch to be kept over the gardens lest animals should get in.

There were four government headmen in Gumba during my stay. Theoretically they are village headmen. The villages in which official records group Ovimbundu do not conform to the actual villages in which Ovimbundu live. Anybody moving from one village to another has to pay a fee; as the Ovimbundu move about quite frequently and no attempt is made to enforce this rule locally, the result is this discrepancy between paper and real villages.

The government headman's duties are those already described for the chief. As with the chief, there is only sufficient backing from the post for him to carry out the orders he receives; he does not receive power to enable him to exercise political leadership and judicial authority at the local level, nor is he a representative of the post in the villages. His interests and values are linked to those of his neighbours rather than to the post. It is through the chief and the government headmen

[14] Some villages are obliged to grow sisal and take it to the post without payment.

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[Village of Epalanga]



cluster was much more autonomous *vis-à-vis* Sapapula than were the members of the Mbati-Mwehombo grouping through the more numerous and closer kin ties; yet it would be wrong to regard Ndjoleya's kin as isolated.[4] This greater autonomy was a matter of degree rather than kind.

With regard to geographical origin, it is evident that the population had been recruited from over quite a wide area. Of the 36 household heads 7 were born in Cela of whom 6 had come from Cela to Gumba, and 1 had been born in Cela, then come to Gumba, then moved to Menga and then returned to Gumba. 3 household heads had come from Utende to Gumba, and 2 had come from Namba. 12 had come to Epalanga from Cassongue. 7 household heads (including 2 who had subsequently lived in Cassongue) had at one time lived in Katembo (the village associated with Mbati). 1 householder was apparently born in Gumba but had no Katembo link. 2 household heads were from Ndjandju (one having lived in Cassongue after leaving Ndjandju, the other being the catechist) and 1 was from Chicunda. On the origins of 5 household heads I have no information.

My information on Epalanga suffers from a number of gaps. Some genealogical information collected was lost. Too frequently I neglected to ask if a particular relationship was patrilateral or matrilateral, nor did I enquire sufficiently as to whether particular marriages were between kinsfolk or not.

These deficiencies to some extent 'fit' the kinship system. A kinship tie may exist between two people which is significant in the social relations between them, yet they may not be sure as to whether it is patrilateral or matrilateral, or even as to what is the category of kinship involved. Thus a resident of Simbwyikoka's village told me one day that Simbwyikoka was his 'brother', some time later he was a brother-in-law, and after this again said that he was a 'brother'.

There is also confusion over pedigrees. The pedigree which Simbwyikoka gave me in December 1955 differed from the one that he gave me in April 1956. Two people who claim to be

[4] Ndjoleya once referred to himself as *Oukulu yimbo* (elder of the *imbo*) this being a case of *imbo* used for a cluster within a village. Ndjoleya's folk recognized Sapapula as being head of the village.

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wife of Ernesto (6). Patrilateral 'father' to Paula (24) and Saviel (11). Affinally related to Mwehombo, a 'sister' of whom he had married.

Wayangu, paternal half-brother of Mwehombo, resident at Epalanga till the end of 1955, wife's father to Aspirante (1) had married a sister (not clear whether own or classificatory) of Lusase.

### 3. *Kinship and marriage in the village setting*

The foregoing tabulated information and the charts indicate the two main principles of integration in Epalanga, as in other Umbundu villages, the settling of individuals near senior kinsmen and the existence of a number of intra-village marriage ties.

For a clearer outline of village structure to appear, it is necessary to give a brief sketch of the contemporary kinship system which will be discussed more thoroughly in later chapters. This is cognatic, with little distinction between patrilineal and matrilineal kin, the elementary family being the basic household unit, the individual being permitted to settle with any category of kin, and a high percentage of preferential marriages.[1]

The right of settling where one pleases, as 'the heart chooses', is recognized even in children. Minessi, the 7-year-old son of Gonçalve (18), used generally to eat at the household of his father's sister Paulina, the wife of Joaõ (20). Gonçalve said about this to me 'He is very fond of his father's sister.'

While the traditional norm by which a man lived in his father's village is still remembered, at least by older men, a

[1] Childs (p. 36) states that it is permitted to marry a cross-cousin on either side, a sister's daughter, and a father's sister. My informants generally agreed that the marriage with a father's sister was not and had not been permitted. Marriage is not permitted with 'true' kin of these categories. Padre Feltin, the superior of the Bimbe Catholic Mission who knew of the existence of these marriages, told me that very few Umbundu marriages came within the prohibited (a prohibition removable by a dispensation) degrees of kinship laid down by the Catholic Church (that is, up to, and including, third cousins). Such marriages in the past might have been with geographically as well as socially distant kin. Childs quotes a case of a marriage arranged, after the discovery of a kinship tie, between partners living as far apart as Ciyaka (Quiaca) and Ngalangi (Galangue).

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spent 10,000 escudos, he told me, in buying shells to trade in Kwanyama country and even if this be regarded as an exaggeration such an expedition will cost at least several hundred escudos.

I have not so far discussed labour migration and its economic consequences. There are three ways of going out to work: being recruited for 'contract labour', which involves selection by the chief and government headmen who send people to the post whence they are directed to wherever they are required; being recruited by labour-recruiters who visit villages with their lorries; and travelling, usually on foot, to find work. Contract labour is for a year, which may be followed by a fortnight's work at the post to which the *contratados* are returned. The coffee plantations of Amboim and Seles are important centres for voluntary labour from Gumba and neighbouring chiefdoms. Women, and boys from ten years up, go to work there for spells which may be only two months. However, even in Gumba whose people have a reputation for backwardness and for lack of enthusiasm for going away to work, there is nothing at all surprising in meeting men who have learnt a few words of English in Johannesburg.

Of the 36 household heads of Epalanga, 9 were women, and 8 were men who for one reason or another (elders, cripples, the catechist) would not leave the village. Of the other 19, 6 were absent as labourers during some part of my stay, and this figure excludes individuals who were not expected home within a year. In the cities there are large numbers of permanently or semi-permanently urbanized Ovimbundu, who have largely lost contact with their home villages. Some people who have spent years in the towns may come home—in Epalanga there were at least five women who had visited cities.

Although almost all able-bodied men and many women have lived outside the context of village life as servants to Europeans, as labourers on plantations, and as urban workers, it would be a mistake to think of the rural areas of the Benguela Highland, as being labour reservoirs economically dependent on the towns. It seems that prices of manufactured goods are lower near the railway line and in the cities; hence a man returning from wage labour may buy cloths, a bicycle, a sewing-machine, or a

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for the bride's village. Here they may be greeted with formal speeches of welcome in Portuguese, a usage copied from the reception of missionaries.

One only turns up to a wedding if one has been invited, and not everybody who is a kinsman living in the neighbourhood is invited. Nor is there any marked distinction between kin and non-kin in the ceremony, except for the ending of avoidances and the recognition of the father's sister, who is recompensed for her services as nursemaid. Village membership is significantly recognized in the distribution of food, and the sending of the party to the bride's home to represent the bridegroom's village.

Umbundu marriage is virilocal, although a certain number of marriages are within the village. Apart from such marriages, it seems to be rare to find a man settling in a village because his wife has kin there.

Although during the early months of the marriage the bridegroom's mother may supervise the bride's work, the individual household is essentially an independent unit[13] and was not even in the past merged with other household units to form a 'grandfamily'. This independence is not isolation. I have only a very few times seen houses with any sort of compound about them. Much of domestic life, eating, working, resting, talking, may be done out of doors in front of the house. Paying visits is a great feature of village life especially when the day's work is over, although there is also a term *oku pasula*, to visit in the morning, referring to what are usually just short calls, involving the exchange of greetings. Perhaps the opportunity of calling and being called on is one of the factors maintaining the village as a social unit. The idea that a man should not eat with his wife still survives to some extent so that questions on this topic receive contradictory answers. Observation shows that even among the men who travelled on the caravans, eating with one's wife is the general practice.

One of the most striking features of Umbundu domestic life is the close companionship which exists between husband and wife and which is unquestionably a modern development.[14]

[13] See Magyar, pp. 281–3.

[14] The role of the *Ondjango* as described by Childs and Hastings indicates that a man's normal companions both for eating and recreation were other men.

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595 17 married men, 5 were polygynists. It is a common practice for a man with two wives to keep one in one village, another in another. Relations between co-wives are expected to be somewhat strained, as the very word for co-wife, *osepekai* (she of the jealousy of women) indicates. When I asked if a woman would help a co-wife who had run short of grain I was told that she would not help but would jeer at the other woman. There is no defined division of duties between wives in a polygynous household. It is interesting to note that the missions are not criticized for imposing monogamy—indeed the Catholic catechist of Epalanga thought he had found a good argument against the Protestants by accusing them sincerely but inaccurately of allowing polygynous marriages. The idea of Catholic marriage as indissoluble is difficult for many Ovimbundu converts.

592 While the most common form of household is that of the elementary family, the fact that not all widows or divorcées are absorbed into such households leads to the appearance of households under women heads of which there were 9 (out of a total of 36) in Epalanga. Such a household may be two- (mother, children) or three-generation groups (grandmother, daughter(s), grandchildren). Of these 9 households 2 were composed of a grandmother, who was effective head of the household, her children, and the children of a daughter; 1 was similarly composed but with the grandmother rather pushed into the background as in households with male heads; 3 were composed of women and their own child, or children; 1 was composed of a woman and a grandchild; and 2 consisted of women living alone. The adolescent sons of such a household will tend to become associated with the house of some male kinsman, probably a mother's brother. It is not always clear to what extent individuals associated with a particular household in fact participate in its activities. Thus it is not infrequent to find the elderly mother of the husband or wife living in a hut of her own behind the main hut or huts of the household, and in Epalanga there were four of these attached mothers. They do not exercise any authority over their sons, or sons-in-law.[19]

[19] Tumbu, the mother of Maria, the wife of Paulo (24), and of Jaime (19) lived in a hut near both households, and it would have been difficult to say to which she was attached, to her son's, or her son-in-law's.

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At the other end of the age-scale it is not easy always to tell to what household a child is attached. Small children may often eat with kin other than their own parents if they like them and thus share in the lives of two households. Children and adolescents may go on visits to kin and this may lead to permanent residence. This familiarity with other households is not confined to children. Although, as has been stated, eating with one's wife is the usual practice, it is by no means uncommon to see two or more men eating together, either because the wife of one of them is away or simply to be sociable.

This right of children to move about, coupled with such other factors[10] as the relatively high divorce rate, tends to bring about quite a high proportion of children who live with kin other than their own parents. Out of 70 under 20's in Epalanga (out of a total population of 148), 34 had both parents living in Epalanga,[11] 23 had one parent living in Epalanga and 13 had neither parent living in Epalanga. Of the 23 who had only one parent living in Epalanga, 7 lived with their father and 16 with their mother. Those 7 living with their father were all over 14, thus confirming the norm given by informants that young children on the death of the mother go to their mother's kin until they 'have sense', that is, are about 12 or 13, when they return to their father. Of the 13 who were living with neither parent, 2 (boys) were living with a cross-cousin (father's sister's son, for whom the term 'father' can be used), 1 (boy) with a patrilateral 'father,' 2 (1 girl, 1 small boy) with a mother's mother, 4 (3 boys, 1 girl) with a sister's husband, 1 (boy) with a paternal half-brother, 1 with a fiancé's father, 1 (boy) with a mother's brother, and on 1 (girl) I have no information.

These figures are too small to base any very strong argument on them. It is, however, notable that only 1 of the 12 children on whom information was obtained was living with a mother's brother, whereas 4 were living with a brother-in-law. This seems to conflict with statements made earlier as to the present-day trend of individuals to settle with their mother's brothers.

[10] Childs notes about the traditional system that the sending of children to stay with kin or friends for a year or two was common (pp. 104–5).

[11] This figure includes one case where although both parents lived in Epalanga they were separated.

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This strong pull towards the mother's brother is, however, marked on the level of village relationships as has been already noted. It is possible that with regard to co-operation on the domestic plane the tie between a man and his wife's full or half siblings is stronger than that with his sister's children. This argument would claim that the tie created by marriage between a man and his wife's full or half siblings is one of the strongest in the Umbundu social structure, and as a further proof (albeit not quantitively assessed) may be quoted the frequency with which two households close together turn out to belong to a man and his wife's brother.

In the first section of this chapter it was argued that the high rate of preferential marriages greatly increased the number of social ties between individuals in a neighbourhood, and brought a renewal of ties with distant kin. In this section various aspects of the relationship between husband and wife have been examined. Husband and wife co-operate economically and outside working hours may pass their evenings together. In a dispute taken to the post a man is likely to take his wife as a witness. Mystically sanctioned obligations do exist between husband and wife. While the elementary family is the main domestic type, households headed by women are also found and there is a certain amount of mobility of children between households. The tie of a man with his wife's siblings, particularly when they are children, is significant for the domestic organization of households.

Marriage is indeed the pivotal institution of the Umbundu kinship system. The preferential marriages do not link descent groups to one another; rather they bring about the local concentration of kin which makes out of many vague and insecure links a strongly-woven community in which both husband and wife can live with relatives near at hand.

Of the personal relationship between husband and wife it would be impossible to say as an anthropologist has of another African people, 'Here people looked for little in marriage. A man would turn to his sixteenth cousin twice removed before he turned to his wife.'[22] A man shares with his wife his work and leisure, is linked to her by mystical obligations which are not

[22] Elenore Smith Bowen, *Return to Laughter*, London, 1954, p. 117.